



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

Health

August 2006



PHOTO: USAID/AFGHANISTAN

A trained doctor vaccinates an Afghan baby. Roughly 340,000 patients receive services monthly at USAID-funded health clinics.

HEALTH SNAPSHOT

- 7.4 million people have improved access to basic health services
- 539 health clinics constructed and 128 under completion
- 328 health facilities strengthened
- 7,575 health workers including doctors, midwives and nurses trained
- 13,150 people receive health care services daily through clinics and direct outreach workers
- 4 million children vaccinated against polio

BACKGROUND

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world; a woman dies from pregnancy-related complications every 30 minutes. One in five children die before the age of five, and life expectancy is 45 years. While these statistics are formidable, there has been progress: through USAID programs more than seven million people in 14 provinces gained better access to quality health care.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

USAID made basic health care for rural communities a priority with a primary focus on women and children's health. To complement the building of clinics, roads, and water systems, USAID trains essential health care professionals and educates Afghans about better health habits.

USAID's maternal and child health program, Rural Expansion of Afghan Community-based Health Care (REACH) project, has been working very closely with the Ministry of Public Health to provide essential services to the Afghan people. REACH is improving the capacity of individuals, families and communities to protect their own health; trains health providers in basic communication skills needed to do their work; produces a range of health education materials for use in homes, clinics and public places; and helps the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) harness the media to deliver key health messages. REACH is changing behaviors, and promoting health practices to create a healthier Afghanistan.

DELIVERING QUALITY HEALTH SERVICES

Volunteer community health workers are a vital asset to the understaffed health care system in Afghanistan. USAID and the Ministry of Public Health together support volunteers throughout the system--from basic health centers in villages to provincial hospitals. Approximately 340,000 patients received treatment and counseling monthly from USAID trained community health workers. Almost 75 percent of the patients served are women and children.

In conjunction with the Ministry of Public Health, USAID is building and renovating clinics throughout Afghanistan to provide people in rural areas easier access to healthcare, primarily in underserved areas. As of July 2006, more than 539 health clinics have been built or refurbished, and another 128 are under construction.

TRAINING HEALTH PROVIDERS

Given the remote villages across Afghanistan and the lack of education for many, training in better health practices is critical for saving lives. USAID has trained nearly 7,575 health workers including pre-service training for midwives and community health workers and in-service training for doctors, midwives and nurses.



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Health (continued)



PHOTO: USAID/AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan's first professional midwives graduate after a gap of seven years. USAID has trained roughly 5,900 community health workers and midwives. Nearly 1,200 doctors, nurses, and midwives participated in USAID's refresher courses since 2003.



PHOTO: USAID/AFGHANISTAN

A lab technician in Touraghondi, Herat provides lab results for patients. USAID has built 539 health clinics across the country.

More than 8,000 women participating in 'Learning for Life' classes acquire literacy and numeracy skills while, at the same time, learning good health and hygiene practices to apply in their everyday lives. Topics include: personal and environmental hygiene; transmission and prevention of infectious diseases; immunization; nutrition; birth planning; and post and antenatal care.

BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE HEALTH SYSTEM

A well-functioning health system is the foundation of better quality health care for the country. USAID has worked with the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) on improving the capacity of the MOPH to plan and manage, allocate resources, increase human capacity, strengthen the health information system, monitor and evaluate the Basic Package for Health Services (BPHS) and the Essential Package of Health Services (EPHS) programs. Additionally, working with the MOPH in making management and policy decisions based on data, and managing the essential drug supply system at national and provincial levels, has proved beneficial for thousands of people in rural areas.

EXPANDING HEALTH EDUCATION AND MATERIALS

More than 60 percent of the families in Afghanistan drink unsafe water at home--a leading cause of acute diarrhea. Dehydration, a life-threatening side effect of diarrhea, is a major cause of death among children under five. Through social marketing, USAID launched the product Clorin, a safe, easy method used to effectively treat water. In addition, educational posters and other materials provide important information on good health practices. Other programs focus on educating Afghan families about reproductive health choices.

USAID works with private businesses to expand distribution, disseminate public health messages, and make more products and services available to rural low-income people in a cost-effective way. USAID-funded programs assisted in distributing long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets through household goods shops, hardware stores, bedding stores and wholesale pharmaceutical outlets. This approach has helped to reduce and prevent malaria. The shops benefit from the profits of the more than eight million health products sold to date and more people than ever have access to needed health care products. .

CLINIC CONSTRUCTION

To date 539 clinics and health facilities have been constructed or refurbished.